DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 054 542 EA 003 730

AUTHOR Bates, R. C.
TITLE "Cooperative Research: The Curse or the Cure?"
PUB DATE Jul 71
NOTE 11p.; Speech Given at Central School Boards Committee for Educational Research Annual Summer Work Conference. (20th, Syracuse, New York, July 29-31, 1971)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Personnel; *Board Administrator Relationship; Boards of Education; *Collective Negotiation; *Communication Problems; *Educational Finance; Educational Innovation; *Educational Research; Instructional Improvement; Policy Formation; Public Education; Speeches
IDENTIFIERS Cooperative Research; New York State

ABSTRACT

This address reviews the current status of the Central School Boards Committee for Educational Research (CSS) as seen by administrators and board members of central school districts. Two areas of concern involve (1) a breakdown of communications between this organization and school districts because of the substantial personnel turnover in the districts, and (2) some issues that confront administrators and board members such as the need for updating instruction, a preoccupation with professional negotiations, a need to clarify and strengthen board-administrator relationships, and the continuing problem of school finance. District support of the statewide committee and utilization of its major research projects are suggested as two possible solutions to these problems. (Author/MLF)

ED054542

THE CENTRAL SCHOOL BOARDS COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Twentieth Annual Summer Work Conference
July 29-31, 1971
Airport Inn
Syracuse, New York

Keynote Address
"Cooperative Research: The Curse or the Cure?"
by
Dr. R. C. "Bob" Bates

Sophocles is reported to have said that nothing that is vast enters the affairs of mortals without a curse. The vast promise that is universal public education in America has now produced its curse. Americans are so convinced of the power of universal education and so frustrated in the wake of its fleeting shadow that this vast promise at once becomes a mortal threat when not achieved. The taxpayer is torn between the idealistic urge to seek full realization at any price and the skeptical alternative to withhold support until the promise is guaranteed. The client (student) wants a solid piece of the action, the practitioner demands greater participation in decision-making and the donor (citizen) demands accountability. All this fervor because so many have come to expect so much of universal public education. This is the premier jewel in the crown of the American dream.

A contemporary author, Amitai Etzioni, in a recently published book, Freedom, Bureaucracy, and Schooling, has described the dilemma of educational management in an alarming way. He admonishes wise managers to avoid the mistake of assuming that they can manage the schools. He writes:

> "Typically, most of the alternatives are closed off by forces beyond anyone's control, such as the nature of the building, . . . the failure of the last three bond votes or the backlash mood of the public. Schools", he continues, "are probably less manageable than industrial corporations because they are more in the public eye; they deal in precious commodities (children, values); their achievements are difficult to measure; and their staff members have professional (emphasis mine) aspirations and hence tend to resist authority.
>
> "Under what conditions school systems can be made significantly more guidable," Etzioni argues, "depends largely on new efforts at consensus building."

EA 003 730

The book concludes,

> ". . . perspectives on the future are not as reassuring as one might hope."

Another book, a yearbook published by the National Society for the Study of Education, points out that, while the school has served America exceedingly well, it has not been too effective an instrument for individual fulfillment and social change.

Another author, Frank Jennings of Teachers College, writing in the same NSSE Yearbook, suggests that beginnings have been made and that necessary resources and human skills do exist. He says,

> "What is required is a willingness to settle for small victories, to tolerate provisional defeats, but to persist in our search, our endless search, for better roads from childhood to maturity." (emphasis mine).

The Central School Boards Committee for Educational Research, by its very purpose in being, rejects the Etzioni admonition to educational managers "to avoid the mistake of assuming that they can manage the schools." C.S.S., in every moment of its life, has been guided by a conviction more akin to the Jennings dedication to "persistence in our search, our endless search for better roads . . ."

The Central School Study, born of the creative genius of Paul Mort, and nurtured through a somewhat uncertain adolescence by the insightful Bill Vincent, now stands on the threshold of maturity. Like the young adult of contemporary society, the organization can now emerge strong, and vigorous as an irrepressible and productive mechanism in the struggle for realization of the educational potential of the Central Schools; or in the posture of a faithless and confused teenager, C.S.S. can succumb to the tempting senses of futility and defeatism. To accept the latter course would be a betrayal of the founding fathers. It would be a cop-out, more in keeping with the behavior of the obvious pathological components of contemporary society.

It is with some fear and trepidation that I have the temerity to come before a gathering of school administrators and school board members to give a report on a grass roots review of the current status of the Central School Boards Committee for Educational Research as seen by administrators and school board members of central school districts.

Still, it is my task here to review what you and your colleagues have reported to me individually and to try to develop some kind of a consensus point of view. So, begging in advance for some understanding of the hazards of my assignment, I will proceed.

What follows here is a sort of comprehensive recording of what you and your colleagues have said to me during the past year. I make no attempt to defend these findings as being valid, or accurate, or contrarily so. At this point, I am simply reporting what I have learned in my interviews. Later on, I'll try to offer some suggestions. But hear now your views and those of your colleagues.

First of all, I must report to you that communications have broken down within this organization of central school districts. The signals are weak and the transmissions are both infrequent and irregular. In some cases, the common frequencies for

transmission are unknown. There may be, and undoubtedly are, many reasons for this breakdown in communications. But, whatever they may be, communications need to be improved. Face to face contact occurs mostly at the annual area meetings. Some of these are poorly attended. Sometimes, they have not been held because of other commitments. The Mid-winter and Summer Conferences are poorly attended, especially by school board members. Consequently, central school district personnel are not communicating their needs and concerns to the research staff and, conversely, the research staff is not consulting properly with people on the firing line in planning and reporting the program of research activities.

One reason for the breakdown in communications may be the substantial turnover in personnel that is occurring in the central school districts. My interviews revealed that approximately half of the chief school officers have been in their position for no more than three years. Some of these have served in another central school district previously, but most are young men new to administration, and many have come in from out of state. Likewise, there is now occurring a substantial turnover in school board membership. My interviews indicated that approximately half of the school board members are now in their first term of service. What is more alarming is the fact that most board members interviewed indicated confidentially that they would not stand for reelection to another term. The chief complaint seems to be that the time demands are becoming too great.

This turnover phenomenon is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the communications breakdown. It was clear in my interviews that only the oldtimers were informed and knowledgeable of the activities of C.S.S. The newcomers were not able to discuss research projects past or present. They were not familiar with publications and they do not understand the organizational structure. Most persons interviewed knew whether or not their school district held membership and they knew whether or not there was a budgetary allocation for membership. But, only the oldtimers know much more than the fact of membership.

There is much confusion about how the organization operates; where, how and by whom the program goals are established, monitored and reported. Some indicate that the locus of initiative and determination is the research staff at Teachers College. Others argue that the locus is, or should be, out in the field. These people feel that a membership organization can only function properly when programs are initiated by, monitored by and evaluated by the members who are to be served. There is confusion today about just what the mode of operation may be.

A second area of concern involves the existence of several critical issues which confront chief school officers and school board members in central school districts. Central school districts need help in dealing with these issues and they look to C.S.S. for that help. The issues are numerous and they have been expressed to me in many ways. But they can be summarized, I think, under four general headings:

A. <u>The urgent and continuing need for updating instruction.</u> This area of concern was expressed to me more frequently by chief school officers than by school board members. It is probable that this

A. (continued)

was so because professional administrators feel more competent to discuss the subject than do school board members. The issue has several elements that generate concern at this time. One is the prominent public demand for accountability. People want to know what the schools are teaching and how well they are teaching it. Another element is the concern for performance evaluation. People want to know, in behavioral terms, how well teachers and students are performing in the learning process.

A third element is the pervasive atmosphere of innovation. Never have the substance and the processes of instruction been in such a state of flux. Central school personnel are overwhelmed by the need to distinguish between what is meaningful and constructive and what is merely passing fancy. Every significant change in either substance or process almost certainly necessitates the mounting of a substantial program of in-service training. Change is occurring at such a rapid rate in our schools that the preparatory institutions have fallen far off the pace in preparing professional personnel for existing and imminent practices. Further, the changes are often so extensive that experienced personnel cannot make the adjustments without help. Finally, the issue of updating instruction is further complicated by an emerging acceptance of education as the instrument of social change. Thus, in an age of tumultous social conflict, the demands on education are putting the American concept of free public education for all children to the greatest test in all history. Small wonder that central schools seek help in dealing with the updating of instruction in the 1970's.

B. An accelerating preoccupation with professional negotiations. This issue was more frequently raised in interviews by school board members than by chief school officers. This is probably because school board members are themselves left holding this tiger by the tail. This issue also has several elements. One element is seen as an inordinate usurpation of time devoted to the negotiations process. It is probable that this time demand factor is one that is causing many school board members to be unwilling to continue to serve. Another element is that which is described as an increasing distortion of budgetary allocations as a result of agreements negotiated. It is felt that priorities of expenditure are being distorted as a result of personnel considerations squeezed out of board members in the negotiations process. Another element of deep concern to chief school officers is a resultant circumstance which they see to be a divisive influence in working relationships between teachers, administrators, and board members. The animosities generated in role conflict at the bargaining table are carrying over into working relationships with resultant deterioration of the performance of all parties.

C. An emerging need to clarify and strengthen board-administrator relationships. This issue was raised with approximately equal frequency by both chief school officers and school board members. Again, there are certain elements to this issue which seem to give it more significance than in times past. One element is the antiquity--and sometimes, nonexistence--of written policies and administrative procedures. Without appropriate written policies and administrative procedures, the prerogatives and responsibilities of both school board members and administrators are in constant and fatal jeopardy. Another element of this issue, undoubtedly related to the first, is the previously mentioned phenomenon of accelerated turnover in board and administrator personnel. In days past, when boards and administrators, in circumstances of frequently extended tenure, enjoyed a close, almost fraternal relationship, operational policies existed through osmosis if not in writing. Further, there was not much need for change. In these days of rapid turnover, when boards and administrators sometimes constitute "a community of strangers", clearly written policies and procedures are essential. Finally, the impact of negotiations becomes another element of this problem of effective board-administrator relationships. The pitting of one party against another, which so often characterizes the negotiations process, is almost certain to have a devastating effect on school board-administrator relationships unless prerogatives and responsibilities are clearly stated and adhered to.

D. The continuing and deteriorating problem of school finance. Every school district is plagued by the inadequacies of the existent sources of school finance and this concern is shared equally and mutually by school board members and administrators. It too has certain elements which cry out for resolution. First, there is the continuing trend by the state toward retreat from a full share of responsibility. Each year, in recent times, the state has allocated a lesser portion of the total cost of financing required educational services. Each year the local district has been forced to obtain a larger portion of school support through voter approval of local property tax levies. Herein lies the second element of the issue. The local property tax is the only source of revenue open to fill budgetary gaps after State and Federal contributions have been fixed. The real property tax is one of the most inequitable and regressive taxes in existence. Further, the increasing resort to this revenue source in recent years has compounded public resentment of its inequities. Finally, the ever-increasing demands of a troubled society for expanded educational services necessarily require a broadened base of fiscal support for education. It is not consistent to look to education for an expanded role in social change without recognizing the need for a fiscal structure which guarantees revenue resources commensurate to the need.

A third broad area of central school district need which I have investigated is that concerned with modes and procedures through which board members and administrators seek to formulate local district policy. I have asked, "What processes do you go through and with whom do you consult, when faced with the need to revise or to formulate new district policy?" I have found that policy formulation in your districts is pretty much a "go it alone" proposition. When it comes right down to the resolution of problems, most districts indicate that they operate pretty much in isolation from one another. Some administrators indicate that they consult on a regular basis with their colleagues in the area on matters of common concern but such consultations seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Likewise, some board members mentioned reference to county school boards associations but this was by no means consistent.

When asked to state an opinion on the possible merit of regional approaches to the examination and resolution of common problems, almost everyone interviewed felt that there was great merit in such an approach. But, when asked to assess the degree to which such a regional approach is utilized, almost all expressed the view that the potential had barely been scratched. These responses were equally shared by chief school officers and by school board members.

It should be noted here that there are some areas in the state wherein district superintendents have managed to create a viable and broadly accepted forum for the consideration of common problems. In these cases, the district superintendent has somehow managed to be successful in the exercise of a kind of nonauthoritarian, nondirective leadership which the chief school officers accept and utilize. In these situations, the administrators of the area meet regularly to explore and resolve matters of common concern. These situations need to be investigated more fully to see what is happening there that ought to be happening in other places.

Now more than twenty years old, the Central School Study must filfill the destiny of its adult majority. Lesser men than those who signed that commitment of personal funds to see the organization through the perils of its infancy could not have built such an organization. Lesser men than those I met as I traveled about the state last fall and winter probably could not master the hostilities of the challenge that lies ahead. But, the prize is worthy. And, it cannot be forfeited. Central schools--like all others--must discover, refine, and implement appropriate solutions to the many--and, seemingly, overwhelming--problems which confront public education today. Half-baked hunches, old family recipes and bureaucratic rhetoric will not do. The hard knowledge, the creative, but valid, designs demanded in our times can only be derived from sophisticated research. Mere status surveys, sometimes characterized as the pooling of ignorance, will not produce the conclusive and vital design for education in the seventies. This is not the time to be looking around for slightly used spare parts. We cannot settle for merely patching up old models. The urgency of the challenge calls for basic and fundamental change.

School study councils and various other consortia of common schools and graduate institutions have proven over and over again that meaningful change can best be achieved through cooperative research endeavor. Those organizations which have survived and

contributed major solutions have had one significant asset in common. That asset has been ready access to a substantial capacity for sophisticated research. It is, perhaps, misleading to use the phrase "in common". For, there is nothing common about the character of the research capacity that is necessary to investigate the problems with which we are confronted. School districts must proceed in concert, identifying their common problems, pooling their resources to engage in rigorous research and proceeding together to convert into common practice the promising practices born of research findings. "Do it yourself" procedures as a point of beginning will not solve the major and critical problems of the day. Commitment and determination in cooperative endeavor can bring solutions.

We are really back to the enigma posed by Sophocles. "Nothing that is vast enters the affairs of mortals without its curse." Cooperative research is a rather vast approach to the solution of critical problems of educational administration. It has brought its own curse in that it has substantially raised the hopes of school management personnel. And, all the while, the number and intensity of the problems have been mounting. The question today is, "Is the promise of cooperative research self-defeating?" Do cooperative efforts become unmanageable as the number and intensity of problems accelerate? Can we overcome the problems of communication and the need to close the time gap between identification of need and the validation of solutions?

To paraphrase a time-honored declaration, I came here not to glorify C.S.S., as my report to this point would indicate, but neither did I come here to bury C.S.S. Rather, I came here to urge you on. I mean to admit and to caution that the challenge is great. But, board members and chief school officers all over this country know this. They also believe, I think, that the prize is worth the effort. What you need is not parsimonious advice or crepe-hanging consolation but, rather, someone who will "get in the boat and pull an oar with you", so to speak.

I believe that the enormous resource of a sophisticated research capacity is that rowing partner; perhaps, the coxswain of your shell. Research can "talk you in", but knowledge is to no avail if it is not implemented. In cooperative effort, you--the central schools and the Institute of Administrative Research--can become an unbeatable crew. Let me suggest some elements of "a game plan" for you.

I would like to offer for your consideration a three-pronged attack on the problems and issues that I have outlined above. Call this a strategy for renewal, if you will.

First, I suggest a deliberate and comprehensive effort to strengthen C.S.S. at the local, or area, level. The organization cannot have the vitality that it must have if it exists only remotely--off there somewhere--down at Teachers' College. Or, once a year, when the "circuit riders" come to town for the annual area meeting.

Many of the critical educational issues that I have verified for you can best be approached at the local level. I would, at this point, quote John Gardner for you. Just substitute C.S.S. for the word "society" in this quotation and see how it comes out,

> "The vital society (C.S.S.) and its capacity for renewal depend on the energy, purpose and creativity of its individual members, for only

individuals can produce a society open to innovation and growth."

There is so much you could do, it seems to me, to organize more effectively and to function more consistently at the local level. You have enormous resources in professional talent and vital interest in change sitting right on your own doorsteps. Organize. Appoint a few sergeants to get things done. Explore your local problems. Conduct seminars and symposia. Plan workshops. Organize interdistrict visitations. Use the vehicle of the C.S.S. area organization to do this. Involve your B.O.C.E.S., the State Education Department, the New York State School Boards Association, and C.S.S. staff personnel. You have almost unlimited leadership talent and experience resource personnel at your disposal. C.S.S. can become much more vitally functional at the area level. You don't have to hope for and wait for an inspired message from the gods.

Gradually, but in impressive crescendo, the understanding is dawning upon us that schooling and education are only as good as the educational personnel in our schools--and especially that it is the teacher in the classroom that matters most. If he is good, little else matters. If he is bad, little else matters.

At the local, or area level, in-service training is the name of the game. We must make provision for in-service programs one of the "fixed charges" of our program planning--no less essential than heat, light, electricity and insurance. We must constantly explore promising practices and new curriculum concepts. We must modify the manner in which we organize for and conduct the instructional process. We must assist--even compel our personnel to update their knowledge and practices to meet the demands of the seventies and beyond. This updating can best be done in the laboratories that are the local schools--where the action is. Rededicate yourselves to the C.S.S. concepts of exchange--pooling and sharing--as the new religion for meaningful change in education.

Second, there is a need, I think, for C.S.S. as a statewide organization to reassess its proper place in the total scheme of the educational enterprise. This is probably a job for your executive committee and/or the steering committee. Many things have happened and many new organizations have been formed during the past two decades since C.S.S. was formed, all of which have a bearing on the mission of support to local school districts.

There is no sense in duplication of services. There is no desire to trespass on the presumed prerogatives or unique capabilities of other service organizations whether they be voluntary and cooperative or institutional and mandatory. What in 1971 is the proper nature of C.S.S.'s functional relationship, for instance, to:

1. The State Education Department
2. The New York State School Boards Association
3. The B.O.C.E.S.
4. The various branches of the State University
5. The several area school study and development councils
6. The regional centers

In view of the emergence and/or maturation of all of these supportive agencies and institutions, C.S.S. must have a different role than it used to have if C.S.S. is to

maximize its effectiveness and its efficiency. The new destiny of C.S.S. needs to be explored and more clearly defined. And, that role must be clearly articulated for the benefit of both its membership and these other organizations which share some common interest.

Third, the assets of a highly sophisticated and potentially powerful research organization must be brought to bear extensively and intensively in the local school district function of educational management. You know, we administrators and board members tend to take almost gluttonous pride in our practical expertise. We tend to look at theorists and researchers as weirdoes with scraggly beards and dirty tennis shoes.

But, our problems today are too complex, and the essentiality of meaningful educational change are just too urgent to be resolved by rule of thumb procedures and, frequently too, common sense conclusions. We just must submit our problems to careful analysis and rigorous procedures of validation if we are to come up with solutions that are worthy of the public trust that is ours.

I don't believe that we practitioners yet realize the full value of the enormous resources that are available to us through the institute of administrative research. "There's gold in them thar hills on Morningside Heights." And, we in the field must find more consistent means of mining and refining that gold.

If we undertake the first step that I have suggested here of taking a hard look at ourselves and our problems, and if we consider the possible assistance of readily available supportive services that I have outlined in the second step, we may find aid and comfort to some of our local needs. But, often, our local needs will prove to be solvable only through the application of hard knowledge derived from meaningful and skilled research procedures. Such assistance is more readily available and more broadly applicable to local school district problems than is generally available. Somehow, the research staff and local district personnel must find ways of communicating more effectively on the subject of "what research has done for you, lately".

Let me refer you to a few major research projects that are now available to you as a service of C.S.S.

1. The Indicators of Quality Project. If your district hasn't applied the indicators as yet, you should take immediate steps to do so. This is an invaluable resource for putting your local decision-making process on a more informed basis. It will give you information about what is happening in your classrooms that you've never dreamed you could get. Ask a man who owns one! Or, more appropriately, ask a school district that has already applied indicators.

   This is one way to find out how well you are doing.

2. The Index of Pupil Gain. Another way of finding out how well you are doing is to develop in your district the index of pupil gain. Much work has been done over the years in trying to elicit truly

2. (continued)

meaningful conclusions about the quality of education through achievement test measures. There have been many weaknesses in this measure and much difficulty in trying to interpret results.

C.S.S. has devoted itself for years to the refinement of achievement test measures. We can't say that the millennium has arrived, but we can say that many of the kinks have been ironed out and that C.S.S. has now developed a way to utilize achievement test measures with meaningful results.

3. 33 Roles for Teachers and Students. After you have undertaken such efforts to find out how well your schools are doing in the instructional process, you may well be saying, "Well, o.k., I now know something about what our problems are, but what can I do about them?"

Well, first off, you, yourself, will have some answers. Secondly, if you vitalize the C.S.S. organization in your own area, you can share your problems and concerns and cooperatively develop some solutions.

Then, you can turn again to the research effort of C.S.S. "33 Roles for Teachers and Students" is a procedure which has grown out of applications of indicators in school districts all over the country. It is a direct answer to, "What can I do about the problems revealed by the indicators?" It is a way of involving teachers and students in an effort to improve the instructional behaviors of both.

4. The Quality Inventory. Finally, C.S.S. has developed a broad guaged approach to the assessment of your school district's performance. It is part of a package which also includes application of the indicators and of the index of pupil gain.

In many ways, the quality inventory is a synthesis of and a culmination of the many research projects aimed at defining quality in the educational process that C.S.S. has been working on for two decades.

The quality inventory is a procedure for "putting it all together". It is a way of taking all that you have learned about your school system and "striking it up on the wall" for comparative analysis.

Well, perhaps I have labored here too persistently and too long. But, with some apology, I do want to impress you with what I consider to be the critical role that meaningful research must play if we are to resolve the educational problems of the day. I think that we have taken C.S.S. too much for granted and have not fully realized and utilized the enormous potential that is ours in such a sophisticated research organization.

Finally, I want to say again that your responsibilities are not nominal but, very substantial. There are no easy answers and anyone who offers such is a "quack". No dynamic and brilliant person can do the job for you. You cannot "buy" solutions. You can put up some of your resources to obtain tools which you can use to develop solutions. But, after all the rhetoric, you just have to get down to work.

In an address to the recent graduating class of Stanford University, Eric Sevareid had some words of challenge which I think offer an appropriate close to my message. It brings us back, really, to Jennings' contention that persistence is the only acceptable approach to our efforts. Sevareid stated it this way,

> "What counts most in the long haul of adult life is not brilliance, or charisma, or derring-do, but rather the quality that the Romans called 'gravitas'--patience, stamina, and weight of judgment. . . . The prime virtue is courage, because it makes all virtues possible."

Courage! And, persistence! That's what it will take to make cooperative research work. We must prevail because only the power of sophisticated research process--beyond the reach of any of us, individually--can resolve the problems of educational administration which confront us today.

Thank you and good luck.

RCB:fm
7/71